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SIPDIS

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TAGS: MOPS PREL SMIG SOCI

SUBJECT: SHANNON/IMMIGRATION: PM EXPRESSES CONCERNS

REF: DUBLIN 1739

Classified By: AMB JAMES KENNY FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D

¶1. (SBU) Summary. During a meeting with the Ambassador and Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham, the Irish Prime Minister raised his concerns about two separate issues: the U.S. military's use of Shannon and the immigration bill pending in Congress. He also updated the Senators on the Northern Ireland Peace Process and discussed transatlantic relations. End Summary

A Warning on Shannon

¶2. (S) PM Ahern asked the Ambassador to confirm that the U.S. has not and will not transport prisoners through Shannon airport. Echoing comments we had heard from DFA earlier in the week (reftel), the prime minister said that while there are no plans to alter arrangements with the U.S. at Shannon, the subject is "beginning to worry people." He referenced his government's repeated defense of the U.S. military's use of Shannon to parliament, in which he and other ministers have referred to U.S. assurances that enemy combatants have not transited Shannon enroute to Guantanamo or elsewhere and will not without consultation. "Am I all right on this?" he asked the ambassador. Following the meeting, Sen McCain told the ambassador he plans to raise Shannon with the Administration when he returns to Washington and will underscore how very important it is that the U.S. not ever be caught in a lie to a close friend and ally.

Immigration Bill - Concerns about Irish "overstays"

¶3. (SBU) The Prime Minister raised the issue of Irish citizens who had overstayed their visas in the U.S. and asked for an amnesty for them. He indicated that the Irish government is following legislation in Congress closely and would like Irish "overstays" to get a second chance. Sen McCain recognized his concern and explained some of his own goals with regard to the legislation. Comment: The prospect of Irish overstays being deported from the U.S. is a major concern with the Irish government and public. It garners much press attention, and adds to disgruntlement over fingerprinting. End Comment

Transatlantic Relations, Iraq, MEPP and Ukraine

¶4. (C) Responding to questions from Senator McCain, the Prime Minister said that the U.S. could solve its problems in Europe by putting attention into the Middle East peace process. PM Ahern said that Iraq must be a success and that all must help make that happen. Politicians, the prime minister said, were "getting over" their disagreement with the U.S., but the public has not, yet, especially as regards Guantanamo and Abu Graib. McCain raised the issue of Ukraine. Ahern referred to Russian President Putin as a "slippery character." He talked about the gala Putin had put on for the EU at the celebration of St. Petersburg's 400th anniversary but said there had been absolutely no Russian follow through on promises made then with the EU. "All show and no action" is how he described Putin's approach to the EU.

Sen. McCain Gets Standing Ovation

¶5. (U) Senator McCain came to Ireland to deliver a speech to Trinity College on re-building transatlantic ties. He received a standing ovation from the crowd of 400, and favorable press coverage. His reference to Putin as an autocrat meddling in Eastern Europe drew headlines, but the thrust of his message was this, "When the United States and the countries of Europe stand together, it creates a moral and political force that gives no ground to the enemies of freedom. The world needs us together and we need each other."

KENNY